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AUTHOR Martin, James A.; McGee, Mildred L.
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ABSTRACT

Quality Circle/Site-Based Management (QCSBM) concepts were introduced into educational administrative structures during the early 1980s. The scarcity of comprehensive research that focuses on QCSBM implementation in public school districts was the catalyst for this exploratory study. Fifty-five of 100 administrators and consultants in 24 states responded to research questions designed to identify districts that had implemented QCSBM programs, to determine the impetus for implementation, and to solicit the respondents' perceptions of the results. Responses were given to the following questions: (1) What was the district's management structure prior to QCSBM? (2) What caused the district to move into QCSBM? (3) Which administrative faculty processes were utilized in QCSBM experiences? (4) What major variables are necessary for implementation? and (5) What are the advantages of QCSMB? A detailed account of results is provided. In general, those surveyed strongly identified with the philosophy that participative management and problem solving are critical to the people building skills of the education process as a whole. (EJS)

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QUALITY CIRCLE/SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

James A. Martin
Education Administration
West Virginia University
(304) 293-3707

Mildred L. McGee
Supervisor
Upshur County, West Virginia Public Schools

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Quality Circle/Site-Based Management Implementation in Public School Districts

Abstract

A form of participative management known as the Quality Circle has been discussed in the business literature since 1962. By the early 1980's it had begun to appear in the education journals. This baseline study was undertaken to identify the districts that had implemented Quality Circle/Site-Based Management (QCSBM) concepts during the 1980's, to report why they had implemented them, and to categorize, synthesis, and analyze respondents' perceptions of the effects of implementation. One hundred administrators and consultants in 24 states working in 55 school districts were surveyed. They reported that the factors which precipitated district movement into site-based management were the desire for change, an improvement in communication, and for faculty participation/ownership in programs and decisions. The availability of administrative support, released time, participant compensation, and training for participants are vital to site-based management success. One response summarized the findings succinctly, "Site-Based Management is an opportunity for participating employees to develop a model and internalize a process for change that can be universally applied."

The new leader is a facilitator, not an order giver. (p. 209)

John Naisbitt
Megatrends

Use of a participative management form known as the Quality Circle has been discussed in business literature in the United States since 1962. A Quality Circle, also called site-based management in education administration, has been defined as a group of volunteers who have a similar work assignment and who meet regularly to identify, analyze, and solve problems related to their work (agreement). Prior to implementation, these individuals receive training in the use of formal techniques in group problem solving as well as the procedures to be applied as work place problems are addressed.

As an antecedent to studying site-based management in public school districts, the researchers reviewed the use of Quality Circles in the business world. The locus of the literature examination were research reports which specifically focused on the worker, the manager and organizational productivity. The researchers were able to locate numerous studies done within the industrial setting over the past thirty years. The few reports of Quality Circle/Site-Based Management (QCSBM) implementation in education which the researchers could locate were isolated case studies completed within the past decade. The paucity of comprehensive studies which focused on implementation of the concept in public school districts was the catalyst for this study.

The National Quality Circle/Site-Based Management Study

The reports of Quality Circles as an organizational tool in education administration have appeared in journals for less than a decade. Are QCSBM programs an option for a school district to consider in order to meet the demands for increased educational productivity while holding expenditures at current levels? Is the QCSBM a viable education organizational model? The literature seemed to indicate that it held promise to increase education productivity through the involvement of faculty in problem identification and resolution. However, the search of the same literature failed to locate a single national study of the application of the concept in education. Thus, it was the intent of the researchers to generate baseline data by surveying all school districts in the United State known to have utilized Quality Circles during the decade of the '80s.

Source of Data

The researchers initially identified the school district population through a literature search. The search uncovered the Illinois Renewal Institute, Inc., in Arlington Heights, Illinois, an organization which provides consultant services to educators interested in Quality Circles. A phone conversation by the researchers with James Bellanca, Director of the Institute, provided the researchers with a list of the names of school districts which he knew had utilized Quality Circles. He also directed the researchers to the Quality Circle Institute in Red Bluff, California, a preeminent Quality Circle consultant program for business. It provided an additional source of school district names which were utilized by the researchers.

The primary focus of that organization has been devoted to providing training and materials to those utilizing the industrial model of Quality Circles.

Questionnaires were mailed to all individuals identified through the sources identified above. The researchers used the last section of each questionnaire to ask participants to list the names of other individuals or school districts which they knew to have been involved with the QCSBM concept. Questionnaires were then sent to all new names identified. This procedure was continued until no new individuals or districts were identified.

Population

Questionnaires were sent to the entire population of school districts reported to have worked with the concept of QCSBM in education during the 1980's. The questionnaire recipients consisted of 100 administrators and consultants in 24 states working in 55 school districts. Fifty-five percent of those individuals contacted participated in the study. Currently, the researchers have usable data on QCSBM implementation in 40 school districts in 23 states.

Statement of the Problem

This research was designed as an exploratory, or baseline, study to: identify districts that had implemented Quality Circle/Site-Based Management programs (QCSBM), determine the impetus for implementation, and the respondents' perceptions of the effects of the implementation.

Responses to the following questions were sought:

1. What did the district organization and management structure look like prior to implementation of the QCSBM program?

2. What were the precipitating factors that caused the district to move into QCSBM?
3. Which administrative-faculty processes were utilized in QCSBM experience(s)?
4. What are the respondents' perceptions of the major variables necessary for implementation of QCSBM?
5. What were the major advantages of QCSBM reported by the respondents?

What did the district organization and management structure look like prior to implementation of the QCSBM program?

The district organization and management structure as described by the respondents universally resembled the traditional pyramidal structure. At the apex were, the board of education, superintendent and other central office administrators. Principals and assistant principals formed the second management level. Third level administrative positions were held by department chairs. Teachers and service personnel completed the typical line-staff positions.

Descriptive comments included: very formal, rigid, and tense. Lack of trust in the powerful top echelon permeated the employees' perceptions of their organizations. There was agreement among the respondents that decision making clearly resided in the central office domain.

What were the precipitating factors that caused the district to move into Quality Circles?

Precipitating variables which provided the impetus for districts to move into Quality Circles varied from a need to counteract negative conditions to a curiosity about the Japanese model of management. Reported negative conditions included

labor unrest, low morale among employees, and diminishing lines of communication between management and staff. A teacher strike, declining enrollment, school closings, and relocation of faculties were reported as factors leading to QCSBM consideration. Several respondents stated that QCSBM were selected as an alternative to negotiations and grievance procedures. These districts were searching for an alternative to the adversarial process for conflict resolution.

Key concepts which caused the districts to move into Quality Circles were identified concisely as the desire for change, an improvement of the lines of communication, and a desire for ownership in programs and decisions. These observations were made by respondents in all three role areas of administration, instruction, and consulting.

Which administrative-faculty processes were utilized in your Quality Circle experience(s)?

The administrative structure and the process(es) utilized in the respondents' districts ranged from initial training of all administrators, including central office personnel and principals, to general information sharing at all levels. Several districts stressed the importance of intensive training of the administration at both the district and school site as a vital first step. This formal training signaled the support from top level management and symbolized a commitment to the concept. One popular process utilized by a number of districts was the establishment of district-wide QCSBM or Steering Committees to initiate the process. Those councils included representation from both professional and service employee organizations. One role assumed by the Steering Committee was the development of a QCSBM policy. Another role of the district committee was to identify and train

facilitators. In one district, the Steering Committee decided on project topics and then had the QCSBM groups address those topics.

Several districts moved directly to selected schools with information and training. Districts generally did not initially implement programs district-wide but utilized a voluntary pilot project approach. Quality Circle/Site-Based Management leaders and members were volunteers. At the building level, Circles were formed in various employee groups, including maintenance, instructional, and paraprofessional personnel.

What are the major variables which are necessary for implementation of QCSBM?

Table 1 reflects the major variables necessary for implementation as identified by the respondents.

Table 1

Major Variables Necessary for QCSBM Implementation

Respondent Categories	Administrative Support	Time	Compensation	Financial Support	Training	Total Responses
Superintendents	4				3	7
Other Central Office Administrators	23	6	1	4	8	42
Principals and Assistant Principals	7	3	2		3	15
Teachers	4	3	1	2	1	11
Other	3	1		2	1	7
Total	41	13	4	8	16	82

The analysis for each variable identified is discussed below.

A. Administrative Support

Fifty percent of the respondents spoke of the administrative support required for the survival of QCSBM. Administrative support had to be available from the board of education, the superintendent, and the principal. So important was this concept that respondents stated that if real commitment did not exist site-based management should not be attempted.

Commitment and support from the administration needed to be evidenced by (1) a belief in participatory management and in people; (2) an attitude which would lend itself to a willingness to be open to suggestions and to listen; (3) recognition of a need for improvement in the decision making process; and (4) a willingness to give time and attention to the program.

Members of the survey groups were quick to recognize and admonish administrators who had given lip service to the concept, allowing tremendous amounts of time to be spent by staff members but ultimately being unwilling to provide a proper management support role for QCSBM activity.

B. Time

The implementation of QCSBM in the education field was severely hampered by the inability to provide the time so vital to management activity. The format of the typical school schedule did not lend itself to providing opportunities for personnel to be available for the length of time necessary for a management meeting. Respondents were consistent in their concern that volunteers were expected to give time before and after the school day. The time commitment has to be resolved if QCSBM is to be a viable activity in education. Money for substitutes

to provide personnel with released time during the week for a regular meeting was suggested. Still other participants believed strongly that management work should not be an additional responsibility but should be part of the job description.

Districts considering QCSBM will have to address this issue and demonstrate commitment through some form of compensation. Time during the work day to implement this concept is paramount to the successful implementation of site-based management.

C. Compensation

In general, respondents expected either appropriate time for fulfilling their QCSBM activities during the work day or compensation for the time commitment outside of contract hours. Even though participation was voluntary, many of the QCSBM members surveyed expected to be rewarded for their efforts. If educators had provided time for management activities during the day, as occurred in the business world, the expectation for compensation would have been reduced significantly.

D. Financial Support for the Project

A successful QCSBM experience can not be achieved without appropriate financial support. Funding was vital and demonstrated the sincerity of administrative support for the effort. A school board which is unwilling to commit dollars to QCSBM activities can not expect to find an interested staff. Financial needs included materials for work sessions, management presentations, consultant training sessions, substitute pay and released time or dollars for reimbursement of participants.

E. Training

Twenty percent of the respondents stressed the crucial element of training. The most effective training occurred prior to the implementation phase of site-based management and included awareness training for administrators and in-depth workshop sessions for participants. A sufficient amount of time has to be devoted to this training component to establish confidence and competence in the concept. Training directed by those experienced in Site-Based Management was reported to be most effective.

Based on the respondents' experience(s) in implementation of QCSBM, what were the major advantages of site-based Management?

Ninety-three percent of the respondents identified a single predominant response theme in outlining the advantages attributed to QCSBM implementation. It can be summarized as ***"teacher acceptance of more responsibility for creating conditions for effective schools."*** Respondents gave high acclaim to the QCSBM as a means of allowing those closest to a problem to be those responsible for formulating its solution. The total QCSBM process facilitated the ownership of the problem and its resolution, thereby increasing worker morale through a recognition of professional expertise in their chosen fields. Support for decisions made was accepted as inevitable since the membership helped create the solution. Members acquired an increased appreciation for the thought processes of their peers. Thus, cooperation was enhanced and collaborative efforts created a sense of teamness and empowerment. Improvement in the individual's self-concept, communications and attitudes toward managerial problems were also listed throughout the responses as being positive QCSBM outcomes.

Conclusion

Those surveyed strongly identified with the philosophy that participative management and problem solving processes were critical to the people building skills of the education process as a whole. Implementing QCSBM drew the individual worker out of isolation, and established non-adversarial processes for resolving conflicts. Improvement in working conditions were equated with better educational opportunities for students in the classroom. Recognition that an individual employees initiative could initiate a change and ultimately improve the organizations goal attainment was not a short-lived experience. One persons response summarized the critical finding thusly, "QCSBM is an opportunity for participating employees to develop a model and internalize a process for change that can be universally applied."